

811.09  
B64c



# A Colonial Sidelight

By  
BEVERLEY W. BOND, JR.



LIBRARY  
OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

Reprinted from THE SEWANEES REVIEW  
for January, 1911



811.09  
B64c

## A COLONIAL SIDELIGHT

To most readers the human side of history possesses an intense interest. But perhaps the historian has no more difficult task than to catch the fleeting bits scattered here and there through musty pages, and to weave them into a complete picture of the daily thoughts and emotions of the past. Occasionally, in some unsuspected corner, one stumbles across yellowing pages that shed a flood of light upon this every-day life. The numbers of the *Maryland Gazette* preserved at Annapolis, form one of the most valuable of these records of the past. Only a few numbers of the first issue, begun in 1728, have survived the ravages of time, but there is a complete file of the later *Maryland Gazette*, beginning April 26, 1745, and continuing to the Revolution. In the lines of the Poet's Corner that appeared weekly in the *Maryland Gazette* a reposeful colonial world is revealed that is far distant from the bustling twentieth century. The literary merit of these verses is only mediocre, but, looking beneath the surface, one may catch glimpses of the varied emotions and the trivial happenings that made up life in the quaint colony by the Chesapeake. Literary tastes, the transient gossip, dainty love triflings, more serious political and religious views, add piquancy to the picture that is reflected in these old-fashioned verses. Frequently it is difficult to distinguish lines copied from British journals from those of home manufacture. The very signatures, "Philo-Musæus," "Eumolpus," and a host of similar pseudonyms add to the confusion. Always, whatever their origin, the lines of the Poet's Corner reflect a part of the life of colonial Maryland.

Even the casual reader finds frequent touches in the Poet's Corner that bring back the literary tastes of long ago. Above all other authors, Pope appealed to the colonial sense of humor. Horace occupied second place in popular favor, while many Miltonic touches reveal the wide influence of the Puritan poet. Shakespeare was only moderately popular, and few traces of a Biblical influence are found. Outside the Poet's Corner, frequent advertisements of book sales afford an index to the

22 ap 15  
25 May 19 Z.T.

general literary tastes. Thomson's *Seasons*, Pope's *Essay on Man*, and many theological works, in addition to heavy tomes in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, reveal the substantial literary diet of the first half of the seventeenth century. Gradually, with expanding tastes, a wider range was sought. Scientific, artistic, and political works were mingled with the weighty volumes of former days. It is interesting to note that among the popular pamphlets was one by Benjamin Franklin on the relations with the mother country. The wide vogue of Fielding and Smollett shows the emotional tastes of many colonial worthies, and Dr. Johnson's *Rambler* was lauded as second only to the *Spectator* in style and contents. In strong contrast to the works of the doughty literary dictator, an abundance of literature on horse races and cock matches affords an interesting commentary on another side of colonial tastes. All these varying intellectual attitudes were constantly being reflected in the Poet's Corner.

Closely connected with the literary life of Annapolis was the popular love of the stage. The Poet's Corner celebrated all the important events in the colonial dramatic world in verses of mediocre merit. Many lines recite the glories of the new theatre which was opened in 1760 "in the presence of His Excellency, the Governor, and a polite and numerous audience." The prologue and the epilogue used on this auspicious occasion, which were composed by a gentleman of the province, were both printed in the Poet's Corner. With such distinguished support the season was most successful. In his closing epilogue Mr. Douglas of the company contrasted his hearty support of the drama in Maryland with the rather Puritanical attitude of certain sister colonies. But his dramatic fervor was not without its humorous side, and the stage-struck swain was not lacking from the ranks of the young gallants that thronged the playhouse. One of these gay provincials praised in rather poor verses the popular actress, Mrs. Hallam, for the delicacy of her manner and her "vox liquida," despite the "ruggedness of the roof," and the "un-toward construction" of the whole house. The defects that the young gallant so mournfully complained of were remedied in 1771 by a new theatre. Flocking to the new favorite, the beaux and belles of Annapolis forgot their pious duties, and the



parish church, St. Ann's, stood desolate. A whimsical metrical petition from the old church reveals the woes of the colonial clergy:

"I feel my vitals fast decay,  
And oft have heard it said  
That some good people are afraid,  
Lest I should tumble on their head.  
Of which this seems a proof;  
They never come beneath my roof."

Frequent touches in the Poet's Corner reveal an intense interest in art. Many of these lines praise the artistic glories of the Continent. In such manner the poet revealed the keen provincial love of travel, and a real appreciation of the artistic glories of the Old World. The wits of the day were also patriotic. Numerous poetic effusions boasted of the prowess of the local artist, Mr. Peale.

This interest in the finer things of life was not universal. Many a colonial satirist bewailed in pessimistic lines the general ignorance. Under the *nom de plume*, Philo-Musæus, one of the cleverests of these satirists reveals the darker side of the picture. After berating his fellow poets, as befitted a true disciple of Pope, he paid his respects to the three classes of professional men:

"Men shine at bar that scarce can draw petitions,  
And quacks' apprentices are dubb'd physicians.  
The meanest wretch that trusts a friend at court,  
Hopes in the church to find a last resort."

In satirizing the smart youth of the town, who rejects religion, and worships Venus, the poet uncovers the failings of the young provincial. A delicious bit of satire closes the description of a horse race:

"And thus, reversing Nature's lawful course,  
An ass shall judge the nobler brute, a horse."

The only remedy for such low standards, the author concludes, is the founding of colleges. This provincial Dunciad produced a great commotion. A wordy serio-comic battle ensued which was typical. Pluto-Kalus, one of his many opponents, having accused him of plagiarism, Philo-Musæus replied that, had he not aroused the resentment of all the dunces in Maryland, he

would have been most unhappy. Although he was even accused of insanity in after attacks, the pessimistic Philo-Musæus refused to appear again in the open. Thus there came an end to this mighty battle of the wits. Under cover of such anonymous attacks, the peppery worthies of Maryland continually enlivened the placid colonial life.

Philo-Musæus was not altogether wrong. A number of ironical lines reveal the bibulous habits of many a provincial gentleman, and the consequent lack of the higher things of life. With a delicious thrust at such conditions, one poet gravely omits from the provisions for a fishing party everything that does not smack of spirituous comfort. But such little failings were not always so whimsically condoned. A colonial prototype of the local option campaigner drew a lurid picture of idle fields, tumbling houses, and general shiftlessness as a result of intemperance. Although so pessimistic a sketch was rather overdrawn, rural conditions were not ideal. Travel was especially hard in the rickety stagecoaches that jolted over the unmended roads. In lines facetiously dedicated to Hogarth, one woe-begone traveller drew a vivid picture of these discomforts:

"Twixt a brace  
Of fat old dames, I squeeze'd into my place;  
A matron with a child on t'other side,  
A sergeant, too, with more than decent pride,  
Was seated; to complete the rueful scene,  
A vintner crammed his bloated carcass in."

Great miseries ensued in these crowded quarters:

"A fit of laughing one old lady shook,  
At which a fit of scolding t'other took,  
The soldier swore to prove his dauntless heart,  
Young master puk'd and gave us all a part."

Very pertinently the poet concludes that, before accepting such company again, "Instead of riding one mile, I'd walk nine."

Many lines in the Poet's Corner deal with the little failings of contemporary worthies. Under thinly veiled allusions the sting is very apparent with which Dame Gossip was accusomed to visit polite society. One of the best of these metrical stories



recounts the woes of a reverend expert in "table battles." Concealing the real names under classical pseudonyms, his serio-comic tale relates how Fabrius, the wearer of the cloth, challenged Vitubo to a match game. Finally, having risked and lost most of his worldly possessions, his canonical gamester even staked heaps of "ancient manuscripts with which the parish had been taught." But Vitubo rejected the sacred lore, and Fabrius, rejoicing in his "undiminished stock," still "retails them weekly to his flock." Returning a sadder, but wiser man, he—

"Put on forbearance with his sable robe,  
And preached on the most patient text in Job."

The wincing of the reverend victim under his sly castigation can well be imagined. Such thrusts at the foibles of the clergy were a favorite form of wit in the Poet's Corner. The lawyers also furnished the butt of many a jest. One of the best and most pointed of these satires tells the story of a lawyer and a bard. The lawyer, a grasping demagogue stung by a poetical attack that he himself lacked the wit to answer, called upon a poet to reply. The bargain concluded, ten pounds were paid in advance, the bard agreeing to return the fee, "if there be fault in sense or rhyme." The bard withdrew, returned, and handed his unsuspecting patron an unspotted paper, asserting,—

"Here's nothing, I told you true,  
So you may dance and caper."

The lawyers and the clergy were not the sole marks of the provincial wits. Often the love trifling of some young gallant furnished the poets with an interesting story. Always the names were veiled under pseudonyms in which the fancy of the pastoral school fairly ran riot. The very signatures, Briareus, Clarissa, Cleander, Philander, reveal the inane contents of these forced flights of fancy. Somewhat in contrast to these chivalrous lines were the numerous satires on the follies of woman-kind. Such themes are found especially in the popular fables. Through them all there runs a quiet play of humor and a constant poking of fun at the fair sex, which is mingled with much homely common sense. The union of youth and old age, the ambitious marriage for money, or position, all are satirized

under the guise of cleverly turned fables. A good illustration of this favorite form of wit is found in the fable of the Poet and his Patron. This quaint allegorical story advised wives to retain the arts by which they won the love of their husbands. Such wise counsel is pointed by the example of a poet whose sonnets were the talk of the town. But one day a young Mæcenas in compassion took the poet from his secluded garret to his own comfortable mansion. With delightful lifelike touches the satirist shows the result of this momentous change:

“Each day deliciously he dines,  
And greedy quaffs the gen’rous wines.  
His sides were plump, his skin was sleek,  
And plenty wantoned on his cheek.”

But fortune quickly forsook the pampered poet and the Muse fled in affright. By this woeful story the author illustrates the homely moral that wives must continually strive to please, for—

“Unthinking fools alone despise  
The arts that taught them first to rise.”

Besides the fables numerous lines appeared in the Poet's Corner which illustrate a homely truth by apt little stories. Here the colonial gallants displayed a most ungenerous attitude toward the fair sex by holding their petty foibles up to public view. Indeed, irony of any sort was one of the most characteristic forms of wit in colonial Maryland. Direct satire was usually avoided. Rather, clever, ironical little touches, innuendoes, were brought in, as in an old bachelor's ideals of womanhood. She must be possessed of sprightly wit without satire, of sober sense without vanity, not devoted to fashion or pleasure, but governed by moderation, able to mingle occasionally in the gay throng, yet to control her heart and smile. If such an one will accept a bachelor of moderate circumstances, “above contempt, below ambition,” he will wed. Of course the crusty old bachelor could never expect to find such a paragon, and was merely paying his ironical compliments to womankind in general. Numerous similar lines by disgruntled admirers of the fair sex are found. All of them have an ironical significance, and many of them employ to a shocking degree the obscenity that the license of the age permitted.

Near the close of the colonial period a wave of artificial sentimentality crowded the weekly columns of the *Maryland Gazette*. Under such signatures as Philander, Evander, and like fanciful names, reminiscent of the pastoral school, a host of distraught lovers loudly complained of their woes. The most trifling incidents served as inspiration for these overwrought "vers de société." Suicide and other dire woes, the authors declared, would ensue unless their complaints were heeded. Even the sight of Miss C. putting on her hat aroused lines that well illustrate the exaggeration of these lovers:

"In pity, Julia, veil those eyes,  
For which full many a swain hath sigh'd.  
Such sweetness, join'd to such a form,  
Each youthful bosom warms,  
For beauty's queen herself must yield  
To Julia's budding charms.  
Thus, when bright Sol at noon of day  
His genial warmth displays,  
We bless the gloomy transient cloud  
That dims the dazzling ray."

Occasionally, as in the ode on St. Valentine's day, really excellent touches creep in:

"The feathered choir attentive wait  
This morn on each successive year,  
And joyous from Aurora's gate,  
Soon as they see the Sun appear,  
The little warblers ope their throats,  
And with their highest, shrillest notes,  
Join in their chorus, and their joys resound."

But even these excellent lines are ruined by the true bathos with which the author, under the fitting *nom de plume*, Philander, beseeches his sweetheart, like the birds, to heed his pleadings. Despite their exaggeration, these artificial poems seem to fit in with the day of the stately minuet, the stiff brocades, and the beauty patches.

But many hardhearted wits did not cherish such tender feelings as their younger brothers. Their satirical attacks upon these lovesick swains show an excellent sense of humor in colonial Maryland. One stern critic published a burlesque which he fittingly addressed to Miss Lucy Charms. He iron-

ically intimated that, like many compositions in the *Maryland Gazette*, his famed lines described everything but the subject. This crude burlesque is carried on with a heart of steel:

“Who hath not heard, what few have seen  
The yellow robes of springly green,  
Which o'er my Lucy's shoulders flow,  
Lovely Lucy, is 't not so?  
Sound the trumpet, beat the drum,  
Tweedle-dee and Tweedle-dum.  
Gird your armors, cap-a-pee,  
Tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee.”

Even more pointedly sarcastic than these nonsense rhymes is an Elegy on a Favorite Cat, who was cut off before her eighteenth month. The subject, the plaintive author avers, is worthy of an art that,—

“Smooth as Philander's verse complains,  
No crude bombast, no harsh and trifling strains.”

Appreciating so sad an occasion the poet will mourn till death which visits alike,—

“E'en tuneful bards, whose macaroni lays  
The weekly column consecrates to praise.”

These subtle satires were not sufficient to restrain the eager imitators of the pastoral school. Philander, the worst sinner of all, was defended in numerous lines that sang his praises. This skilful defense infuses a new courage into the colonial Muse.

A host of other distraught lovers crowded the Poet's Corner under such pseudonyms as Evander, Aminfor, Philomela, and Elzevir. Philander continued to break forth in plaintive strains. Only occasionally in this sea of sentimentality does one find such lines of rare beauty as in a bagatelle in praise of Chloe:

“Tell me not of faces fair,  
Coral lips or jetty hair,  
Sparkling eyes and snowy breast,  
Waiting fondly to be prest.”

A translation of *Anacreon* is really unique in the sympathetic touch displayed in the lines:

“When sable night, slow winding,  
Had gain'd the middle steep,  
And silence, all befriending,  
Had lull'd mankind to sleep.”



Such verses are only occasional. The general tone of the love poetry shows that, with their powdered wigs and silver snuff boxes, the colonial gallants had copied the fashion of their sentimental lines from the mother country. Through all this metrical persiflage the twentieth century reader catches glimpses of the gay gallantry in Annapolis. Society in the little town by the Severn was merely a dwarfed imitation of the fashionable London world.

In strong contrast to the sentimental love poetry, a vein of quiet content runs through the Poet's Corner. Lines of this character reflect the easy plantation life that existed alongside the gay artificial society in the provincial capital. The influence of Horace is apparent in many translations and imitations. Like him the colonial planter would escape, amid the simple pleasures of a rural life, the sycophantic multitudes that throng round the great. One of these Horatian imitations reveals, in one little modern touch, a world of Maryland hospitality:

"What boy attends? Bring ice in haste  
That we therein may cool our wine;  
Hence sparkling Burgundy may taste,  
Fragrant as nectar, drink divine."

Aside from the direct translations and imitations of Horace, the influence of the Roman poet permeates many sympathetic verses that extol the pleasures of a simple country life. Temperance, health, and sports; all the pleasures which the Maryland gentry inherited from their English forefathers, are welcomed in lines that bear the veritable imprint of the Anglo-Saxon's love of the broad and green fields of his own domain. The Ingredients of Contentment aptly express these ideals:

"A little wealth,  
A little business just for health,  
A little house, and fire nose high,  
And spare bed where a friend may lie."

In the choice some long-forgotten philosopher shows the true secret of his restful life. Not to spend the "grey-ey'd morn" in "sprightly chase," not all the pleasures of a wholesome life are sufficient "if sweeten'd not, Content, by thee." Above all, cheerfulness is to be found in "the calm transports of an honest



mind." The quiet restfulness of such philosophy, bred of the open fields, and with the scent of the newly ploughed earth, is epitomized in the opening lines of an *Ode to Amintor*:

"In this soft season let me stray  
Far from the lawless seats of strife,  
Where peace and virtue lead the way,  
Where truth emits her cheering ray,  
And innocence gives joy to life.

"On some enamel'd bank reclin'd,  
Where varied scenes each sense delights,  
Oft let me feast my wondering mind,  
And the sweet consolation find  
That tells me all is right."

Other lines, with the fresh atmosphere of the primitive forest, picture the daily life of the early settlers. First, amid his swarthy slaves, the planter fells the hardy monsters of the forest. Gradually the land is cleared, and his crops

"Before him rise,  
And future riches sparkle in his eyes."

Meanwhile the sports of colonial life, the race-course, hunting, fishing, give zest to life. Sheep, oxen, pigs, chickens, supply the planter's bountiful table, while the sparkling cider dispels all cares. The course of his chief crop, tobacco, is followed, from planting-time, through the killing of such noxious pests as budworms and hornworm, until attending ships waft the product to Britannia's shores. Through these sympathetic lines the Poet's Corner reveals a colonial world of restfulness and quiet where the philosopher calmly pursued the even tenor of a rural existence.

Strange to say, these poems of the plantation life contain few touches of a real appreciation of Nature. Apparently the pall of the classical school stifled spontaneous outbursts over the varying moods and beauties of the natural world. But outside the charmed circle of the Poet's Corner, in a musty yellowed volume of Maryland verses there are a few real nature poems. Of the author, John Thomas, little is known, save that he lived the quiet life of a country gentleman, occasionally dabbling in the petty political strifes of the day. The opening lines of

his longest poem reveal the ideal of the peaceful rural philosopher:

"In these still scenes, remote from care and noise,  
Let me forget the world and all its toys,  
Calm its desires, and from my peaceful breast  
Expel each thought that may dispel my rest."

An atmosphere of Nature permeates this calm philosophy:

"My wants a small paternal farm supplies,  
And yields the blessings which the most I prize,—  
Cool groves, thro' which refreshing breezes blow,  
Gay meads, thro' which transparent streamlets flow,  
Deep vales, o'er which green trees their branches weave,  
Where meditation loves to sit at eve,  
Books, which the eye of study may peruse,  
A friend, sweet-natur'd, and th' attending Muse."

The pleasures of a quiet life give zest to his rural retreat. This delightful rural poet realistically depicts "the loud thunders of the op'ning hound," "the soul-enliv'ning horn," echoing "o'er the hills," and "floating through the vales." With a picture of the "plantation opening all around," the "azure blue" of the peaks of the Blue Ridge, and the "silvery stream of the Potomac," the poet turns to calm reflections upon the course of human events. The entire poem well reflects the calm philosophy of one who, to a real appreciation of rural life, joined a sympathetic love of the bounties of Nature.

Another poem with a fine sense of natural things is a description of Spring by Father Lewis, which was published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, in March, 1732. The numerous trivial incidents of a journey from Baltimore to Annapolis become somewhat wearisome. Yet there is a freshness in color and in rural atmosphere that is comparable to Wordsworth. First the wild flowers greet the traveller:

"First-born of Spring, here the peony appears,  
Whose golden root a silver blossom rears.  
In spreading tufts see the crow-foot blue,  
In whose green leaves still shine a glorious dew.  
Behold the cinque-foil, with its dazzling dyes  
Of blazing yellow, wounds the tender eyes."

In the morning light the poet describes the lark, the turtle-dove, the humming-bird,—

"And as he moves his ever flutt'ring wings,  
Ten thousand colors he around him flings.  
Now scarlet, now a purple hue is seen;  
In brighter blue his throat he now arrays,  
Then straight his plumes emit a glorious blaze."

Such excellent color touches are rare among these colonial poets. In the forest, the "hardy oak," the "fragrant hickory," the "stately pine," rise before the sympathetic view. The poet-traveller responds to all the moods of Nature, and perhaps his best lines describe the hush in the forest before the storm. Slowly the clouds gather, and the sun —

"Shades his sickly light in straggling streams.  
Hush'd is the music of the woodland choir;  
Foreknowing of the storm the birds retire  
To shelter, and forsake the shrubby plains,  
And a dumb horror through the forest reigns."

Then comes the crash of the storm, and the gradual clearing of the sky. The poet resumes his journey until, as he crosses the Severn, the lights of Annapolis appear on the far shore,—

"And now the moving boat the flood divides,  
While the great stars tremble on the floating tides."

These realistic nature-poems unfold only one part of the picture of life in the quaint province. Even amid the peaceful retreats of the plantations, the Maryland gentry took a keen interest in politics. Interminable debates and arguments were the order of the day. So fierce at times did the political strife become that it seemed as if serious results must ensue. But, like opposing lawyers, the Maryland worthies would, in the morning, be in the thick of a political debate, and at night swear eternal friendship over the brimming bowl. Naturally the Poet's Corner did not escape the influence of this world of political strife, but many of its petty disputes bear little interest to the modern reader. One theme of never-dying interest is the gradual rise of the Revolutionary spirit among these philosophical planters. At first an intense loyalty toward the mother country found frequent expression in odes that celebrated different victories over the French. As the French posts advanced along the Ohio, and the Maryland frontier began to

suffer from Indian attacks, supposedly instigated by the hated foe, his loyalty towards the protectress, Great Britain, increased. In the bold, ringing lines of a Recruiting Song, the poet expressed the spirit of the patriot on the eve of Braddock's ill-starred campaign:

"No popery, no slavery,  
No arbitrary pow'r for me,  
But royal George's righteous cause,  
The Protestant and British laws.  
  
Over the rocks and over the steep,  
Over the waters wide and deep,  
We'll drive the French without delay,  
Over the lake and far away.  
  
Then toss about the flowing bowl  
To each true-hearted generous soul,  
That fears not flood or limbs the day  
We meet to drive the French away."

This patriot enthusiasm was not altogether lacking in selfish motives, for with a quaint revelation of the popular view the Poet's Corner exhorted the colonists to deliver the poor Canadians who, in the midst of plenty, suffered such grievous oppression. So alluring are the descriptions of the blessings that Nature has lavished upon the Canadian land, that a faint suspicion lingers lest, like the Crusaders, the thrifty colonial patriots cherished hopes of a substantial reward for their righteous zeal. This rather cynical impression is strengthened by an ode which, with a prophetic sweep of vision that is unique, predicted the rise of civilization along the banks of the Ohio.

An interesting commentary upon the colonial point of view is found in this patriotic poetry. Including the ally of England, the King of Prussia, in the general spirit of loyalty, the poet ascribed to the rather festive Frederick virtues that pass beyond the utmost stretch of the modern imagination. The climax to these decidedly incongruous lines was reached when one colonial wit cleverly turned a paraphrase of the third Psalm to honor the King. Another worshipper at the shrine of the Prussian King, after exhausting the list of virtues, concluded his pæan of praise:

"But words are wanting to say what,—  
Say all that's good and great,—he's that."



From such lines one readily concludes that distance must have lent enchantment to the colonial estimate of continental heroes.

With the passing of the French war cloud, the tide of intense loyalty slowly turned. Gradually, as the mother country began to tighten her grip upon the colonies, the premonitory mutterings of a storm of protest began to be heard. Hardly had the rejoicing over the final conquest of Canada subsided, when lines appeared in the Poet's Corner that exhorted the men of Maryland to preserve intact the most precious heritage of English liberty, the Magna Charta. This spirit of liberty grew sterner until, in 1765, the Poet's Corner was well nigh crowded out by the numerous anonymous protests against the Stamp Act which flooded the *Maryland Gazette*. At length, owing to "an error of judgment" on account of the "intolerable, unconstitutional Stamp Act," the *Maryland Gazette* was suspended from October 31, 1765, to January 30, 1766, except for a brief issue well termed an "apparition." With a temporary lull in the storm, the *Weekly Gazette*, and also the Poet's Corner, revived. Yet a sturdy spirit of independence had been planted beneath the peaceful exterior of the planter-philosophers. This spirit was well expressed in poetic guise:

"The free-born Englishmen, generous and wise,  
Hate chains, but do not governments despise.  
Rights of the crown, government and taxes, they,  
When legally exacted, freely pay.

This spirit of moderation which would fight for just rights, while respecting legal forms, was strongly characteristic of the colonial Marylander. If only he were left in peace, he preferred quiet. Hoping for the best, the poet loyally greeted Governor Eden in 1769 in lines that fittingly imitated Virgil's *Nunc redeunt Saturnalia regna*. In labored classical strains, the poet expressed the general hopes for the new administration. Plenty, he sang, would now arise, and peace return, but, above all, education would receive a fostering hand. Underneath the exaggerated strains of these lines, there was a note of sincerity that undoubtedly voiced the general sentiment of the province.

The fond hopes for peace were swiftly blasted. The haughty assumptions of Governor Eden alienated many persons, and a



storm of clever satire quickly rebuked such conduct. With a keen irony, a paraphrase on Milton's *Ode on the Nativity* compared the arrival of the Governor to the coming of Christ. A more open thrust was given in a dialogue between two farmers, Thomas and William. These two worthies were represented as viewing with utmost contempt the sycophantic fawning of the place-hunters before the new governor. With a keen irony they told of an occurrence never before known in Maryland, how certain gentlemen—

“Were forc'd to go,  
In humble guise thro' frost and snow,  
And on his lordship's servants wait,  
And, cap in hand, open each gate.”

The latent spirit of freedom so evident in these scornful lines was ready to burst forth in a storm of protest if once aroused. The opportunity soon came. As the Assembly had failed to renew the law fixing the clergy taxes and the officers' fees, the Governor undertook to establish them by proclamation. Immediately the indignant patriots broke forth in strains that fully supplied in resentment what they lacked in literary merit.

Amid the general patriotic outburst, the Governor's proclamation served to bring to a head the gradually increasing discontent against the Established Church. Already the failings of the clergy, and their general disregard for their sacred office, had received severe drubbings in numerous satirical controversies. In 1768 one of the most famous of these battles of wit flooded the Poet's Corner for almost two months. By the special favor of the proprietary, the Reverend Bennett Allen had enjoyed two livings at the same time, including St. Ann's at Annapolis, the most important parish in Maryland. The sobriquet, the 'Fighting Parson,' is a sufficient index to the scandalous private life of the reverend gentleman. Such flagrant injustice immediately aroused the parishioners, who voiced their resentment in the *Maryland Gazette*. But the clergyman did not lack defenders, and a satirical controversy began in the Poet's Corner. C. D., apparently a lawyer, voiced the general indignation. In clever satirical lines, with thinly veiled innuendo, he did not spare the character of his reverend victim.

The battle of words waxed fast and furious. Accused of plagiarism, C. D. replied with the incisive wit that stoutly upheld his side of the controversy:

"When Boileau, with an honest rage,  
Cut to the quick a virtuous age,  
All cry'd 'twas borrowed wit.  
When on the model Pope refin'd,  
And lash'd the follies of mankind,  
'Twas all what Horace writ."

In such strains the weekly satirical war continued, doubtless to the infinite delight of the colonial wits. Among the numerous belligerent compositions two stanzas by a supporter of C. D. illustrate in an exceptional manner the merciless lashings of the colonial controversialist:

"His eyes not blear'd with reading books,  
Good God! How very dull he looks!  
Ne'er did one gen'rous deed for any,  
Nor paid a bill till squeez'd a penny.  
From morn to night with toddy muddy,  
His pleasure drink, and gain his study.  
  
With such a varlet to contend,  
No honor's won, and gain'd no end;  
So plain a question to propose,  
Would but arraign the sense of those  
Who Nature's richest gifts inherit,  
And all are sworn the friends of merit."

By his severe castigation C. D. at length won the day and the Reverend Bennett Allen was forced to resign. The controversy is typical of the satiric contests that enlivened colonial life. Also it reveals the bitter feeling aroused by the frequent degradation of the Established Church to a mere office-holding level.

With the arbitrary proclamation of the Governor in 1772 the animus against the clergy reached a climax. Allegorical lines, with only a thinly veiled innuendo, continued to afford a favorite weapon. The author of perhaps the wittiest of these satires fittingly employed the *nom de plume*, Horatio. In clever lines he compared a clerical opponent to a spider which, spreading its envenomed lines, finally caught its audience in the poisoned net. Eugenio, another disguised writer, chimed in and completed the ruin of the reverend gentleman by an intimation that, while such

harmless insects as gnats and flies were despatched, if a wasp entered, the cowardly spider would retreat within the meshes of his web. This bit of satire must have had a telling effect, for the victim deigned no reply.

The clergy were quick to reply in satiric attacks quite as pointed as those of their opponents. Thus, one clerical supporter wrote a clever parody on the scene between Romeo and the Apothecary in *Romeo and Juliet*. A Politician fittingly took the place of Romeo in the parody, while the Apothecary was represented by a newsmonger. Amid such a setting, the clerical wrath against the newsmonger,—the publisher of the *Maryland Gazette*,—was aired to fullest advantage. The unfortunate editor was placed upon a satirical pillory: "Meagre were his looks, perpetual plots had worn him to the bone." Around him, with a fine sense of irony, were placed, "some minutes of harangue," "hell-coin'd catalogues," "booby opinions," "schemes of new lotteries," and on the shelves, "a beggarly collection of legal quibbles." To this "caitiff wretch" the Politician carried his lies,—

"Which, when dispers'd around the province,  
The politicians all will fall stark mad,  
And 'gainst the parsons will discharge their breaths."

But the newsmonger demurred, and in the Politician's reply was another excellent thrust. The satirist was not content merely to pay the *Maryland Gazette* the compliments of the Established Church. Such an opportunity to assail the motives behind the assault upon the clergy was not to be lost, and the lines contained an unmistakable satirical touch:

"Honesty's no friend of thine, nor honest laws;  
Parsons pay thee no hire to make thee rich."

The clergy were not the only victims of the wrath stirred up by the Governor's proclamation, which had included officers' fees as well as clergy taxes. The vials of the public wrath were poured out with a liberal hand upon the officers, who were popularly identified with the entire legal profession. Long-winded prose articles, rather than poetic satires, formed the chief weapons employed. In the midst of such onslaughts the lawyers

did not lack their champions. When Charles Carroll, in his great controversy with Daniel Dulany over officers' fees, rapped the lawyers, he was answered in most merciless fashion. If the 'First Citizen,' the *nom de plume* used by Carroll, was to have his way, the satirist declared that all men of learning would be banished from the province:

"This done, let the empire of folly all hail,  
While patriots, and papists, and puppies prevail."

In a similar ironical poem under the caption, *An Independent Little Barber*, a colonial wit bewailed his sad fate. His marriage, he asserted, could not be celebrated without an enabling act in which the First Citizen had opposed him. Such satirical lines as these represented the office-holding class. But their retorts fell upon deaf ears. The final popular triumph over the Governor's obnoxious decrees was celebrated in a deliciously ironical little poem which was probably directed against Daniel Dulany:

"'Tis strange, in faith, 'tis passing strange,  
To see how men will alter,  
How men do stare to see the change,  
A patriot turn'd defaulter.

"The spider wont, as spiders are,  
To charm in flies by dozens,  
Into his net, tho' spread with care,  
The flies no longer cozens.

"The flimsy toils are spread in vain,  
The swarm to enter doubted;  
How chang'd are things — for all remain,  
Save bumble-bee who scouted."

Apparently this strenuous political strife banished much serious religious thought from colonial Maryland, for little poetry of a devotional nature was written. The gloomy puritanical view in the scant religious poems that are found reflects the influence of Milton, and of such works as Young's *Night Thoughts*. Typical verses, like the *Difference Between To-day and To-morrow*, or *Reflections on the Uncertainty of Earthly Enjoyment*, accentuate the ordinary religious views of the day. The earthly life was pictured as a vale of tears through which the faithful would pass in shadow and sorrow in hope of a glorious future existence.



Perhaps many of these melancholy lines emanated from the brain of some lean parson who, finding little pleasure in the scanty tithes of this mundane existence, looked forward to an eternal triumph over his miserly parishioners. Little wonder that colonial Maryland turned in scorn from the depressing religion of its witless parsons to the pleasures of a joyful outdoor life.

This exaltation of the future life found frequent expression in the elegies with which the Poet's Corner celebrated the departure of colonial worthies from this earthly existence. Often these elegies were ridiculous in their exaggerated praise of the virtues of the departed. Or, again, they descended to mere bathos in picturing the glories of the future life, as in the lines on the death of Miss Peggy Hill:

"Happy, thrice happy change, departed fair,  
Remov'd from earth, the joys of Heaven to share,  
Amidst th' angelic throng, divinely bright,  
Thou, lovely virgin, shin'st, a star of light."

Yet through all this exaggerated sentimentality, there gleams an occasional sympathetic touch. This was especially true of the work of Rev. Thomas Cradock who, in addition to numerous elegies, was the author of an excellent paraphrase of the Psalms. One of the best of his elegies commemorated a Christmas Eve tragedy, when four young ladies and a young man, members of a gay skating party, were drowned in a Baltimore county pond. In these lines the reverend poet exhibited a deeply religious and sympathetic spirit. Bowing to the inscrutable mysteries of Providence, he pointed the bereaved parents to the glories of the future world.

A touch of deeper sincerity also marks an elegy on Dr. John Hamilton. Beneath its stilted phrases there is a note of true affection and of gratitude for the healer. Indeed, to the discerning eye, this deeper touch redeems the seemingly ridiculous exterior of many of these elegies and betrays the real depth of feeling among the colonial worthies. Occasionally an elegy is even found that is free from artificiality and overwrought sentiment, as in lines upon the death of Edmund Key, Attorney-General of Maryland. In these verses the sorrowing poet draws



an affectionate picture of the ideal lawyer and citizen. Modest, candid, beloved by all, the dominant notes of his character are epitomized in these lines:

"The love of justice nobly warm'd his breast,  
And placed him far above the venal tribe,  
Whose hands are ever open for a bribe."

Often, beneath lines that are somewhat artificial, these colonial elegies show deep tenderness, and reveal a world of pathos in the life story of some colonial man or woman. One of the most touching of such old-time elegies begins with the bombastic lines: "At length 'tis past, the dubious conflict's o'er." Such a beginning is redeemed by the later picture of the devoted wife who, to save her husband, braved the terrors of an ocean voyage in the vain quest for health. Her devotion is touchingly shown:

"If to reflect since first he fell a prey  
To ling'ring sickness, and life's worst disease,  
That every duty thou hast done, a ray  
Of peace on thee may shed; be thine that peace."

The closing lines are specially pathetic:

"If yet, in silent sorrow's searching eye,  
Thy fancy sees his clay-cold body lie,  
And all life's splendors sink in endless night,  
And if, to soothe thy throbbing heart,  
These artless lines no consolation bring,  
My Muse shall in thy griefs again take part,  
And, if thou bidst, shall plaintive sing."

Lines like these lay bare the real depths of sympathy and tenderness beneath the caustic colonial exterior.

With the religious poetry we reach the final scene in the panorama of colonial Maryland as seen through the Poet's Corner. The literary merits of these lines by the colonial philosophers, wits, and divines are only mediocre. Accustomed to imitate the mother country in the amenities of daily life, the poet carried this habit in all his literary compositions. Everywhere there is a slavish imitation of classical metrical models. The heroic couplet, or occasionally the lighter four-foot couplet is almost invariable, while a constantly recurring iambic movement only strengthens the impression of mediocre verse.

The rhymes are carefully preserved. Such old-fashioned pairs as: *Joshua-day, are-care, line-join, toils-piles, stream-fame, pur-loin'd-mind, thought-wrote*, have a quaint sound to modern ears, reminiscent of hair-cloth sofas and of old ladies with side curls. The colonial poet faithfully plodded through the mechanics of his art. One cannot help but wonder whether, if these old-time authors had paid less attention to form and more to spontaneity of thought, their lines might not have reached the level of true genius.

Yet, the Poet's Corner has a true enduring value, for through its lines the reader catches fleeting glimpses of a broad life in the colony planted on the shores of the Chesapeake. Stripping aside the outward forms and fashions in verse, we find that humanity was much the same then as now. Society loved the sly gossipy tidbit, while the lover praised to the skies the charms of the colonial belle. The philosopher preferred the peace of his rural retreat. Religion and politics were not forgotten. Yet perhaps life was less strenuous than now. Men had more leisure to cultivate the finer arts of irony and satire, to turn their wit upon their fellow men. Through all these varied scenes there ran the peaceful quiet that was the greatest charm of life in colonial Maryland. Despite its stilted classicism, the fading Poet's Corner has a refreshing atmosphere for the jaded mind, like some pastoral idyll. For through it one catches constant glimpses of the daily lives and thoughts of actual men and women.







